

Dear thai sisters: propaganda, fashion, and the corporeal nation under Phibunsongkhram

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Abstrak

ABSTRAK

Embodying modernity and nationality was a self-improvement task for fin de siècle Siamese monarchs. In post-1932 Siam, kingly bodies no longer wielded the semantic and social potency necessary to inhabit the whole of a nation. Siam required a corporeal reassignment to signify a new era. This study examines previously neglected propaganda materials the Phibunsongkhram regime produced in 1941 to recruit women for nation building, specifically, the texts supplementing Cultural Mandate 10 addressed to the Thai Sisters. I argue that with the Thai Sisters texts, the regime relocated modernization and nation building from male royal bodies onto the bodies of women. Moreover, these texts specified gendered roles in nation building and inserted nationalism into the private lives of women by framing nationbuilding tasks as analogous to self-improvement and the biological and emotional experiences of a mother. Vestimentary nation building prescribed by Mandate 10 turned popular magazines into patriotic battlegrounds where all Thai Sisters were gatekeepers and enforcement came in the form of photo spreads, advertisements, and beauty pageants. By weaving nation building into fashion and the private lives of women, the Phibunsongkhram regime made the (self-)policing of womens bodies-formerly restricted to elite women-not only essential but also fashionable and patriotic for all Thai Sisters.